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ABSTRACT

Although there is a substantial research knowledge base in the field of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), this topical bibliography and commentary suggests that much misinformation still persists. The articles that form the basis for this topical bibliography and commentary agree on the approach that is most effective for ESL acquisition: child relevant materials and conversation that focus on content and concepts. Another important aspect is peer collaboration and the fostering of an environment in which real conversation can take place. The articles summarized in this topical bibliography and commentary also agree that student language acquisition is a social and cultural as well as a cognitive process. Conversation is more than vocabulary and grammar; it involves learning the social and cultural aspects of communication. Contains 14 references and annotated links to 2 Internet resources. (RS)

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Teaching English as a Second Language

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Introduction

More than one fifth of school-age children in America come from families in which languages other than English are spoken. Although there is a substantial research knowledge base in the field of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) much misinformation still persists. The articles that form the basis for this summary agree on the approach that is most effective for English as a Second Language acquisition: child relevant materials and conversation that focus on content and concepts. Another important aspect is peer collaboration and the fostering of an environment in which real conversation can take place.

The articles also agree that student language acquisition is a social and cultural as well as cognitive process. Conversation is more than vocabulary and grammar; it involves learning the social and cultural aspects of communication.

Principles and Practices in Fostering Second Language Development

In summarizing the current research in the field of second language acquisition and culturally sensitive instruction, McLaughlin lists eight principles.

1. Bilingualism is an asset and should be fostered.
2. There is an ebb and flow to children's bilingualism; it is rare for both languages to be perfectly balanced.
3. There are different cultural patterns in language use.
4. For some bilingual children code switching is a normal language phenomenon.
5. Children come to learn second languages in many different ways.
6. Language is used to communicate meaning.
7. Language flourishes best in a language rich environment.
8. Children should be encouraged to experiment with language (1995), pp. 2-7).

In addition, McLaughlin emphasizes the point that American schools operate by a specific set of cultural and social standards: middle-class European-American, which may differ from the student's way of communicating and learning. Students need to learn that ways of expressing basic emotions vary from culture to culture. Teachers need to know that ways of encouraging and praising a student also vary greatly. For example, the teacher who says, "You should be proud of yourself" in an effort to boost a child's self-esteem, may find it to be ineffective. A more appropriate statement for many Latino and Asian children might be, "Your family will be proud of you" (McLaughlin, 1995, p. 3).

Acquiring a Second Language for School

Second Language Acquisition has four major components: *socio-cultural*, *linguistic*, *academic* and *cognitive* (Collier, 1995, p. 2). The four components are complex and interdependent as well as developmental. The environment in which students learn and the incorporation of the surrounding social and cultural processes into that learning affect the student's language acquisition. Collier also states, "to assure cognitive and academic success in a second language, a student's first language system, oral and written, must be developed to a high cognitive level" (1995, p. 2).

Research shows that "bilingual education at the elementary school level is the most promising" (Collier, 1995, p. 6), assuring that students continue their cognitive development. Another important element is parent involvement. In terms of methodology, Collier (1995) states that:

> students do less well in programs that focus on discrete units of language taught in a structured, sequenced curriculum with the learner treated as a passive recipient. Students achieve significantly better in programs that teach language through cognitively complex content, taught through problem solving discovery learning in highly interactive classroom activities (p. 6).

In short, the precepts of using Higher Order Thinking Skills apply to second language acquisition. Time to acquire a second language varies with teaching methods and individuals, but 4-12 years of second language development are needed to reach deep academic proficiency (p. 7). For an overview of current research in the field, *Educating Language Minority Children* by August & Hakuta (1998) summarizes a longer report.

Learning in a Social Context

According to Lu (1998), "language learning is a socio-cultural process" and "it is through meaningful interaction with others as well as functional use in daily life that children develop competence, fluency, and creativity in language." Lu cites Heath (1983), stating that "children learn language, be it spoken or written, through the process of socializing in the specific society that they are in" (p. 1). It is necessary to take into account cultural and linguistic differences. In designing a conducive learning environment, consider how language is used; tone, the role of questions, the nature of silences differ from culture to culture and must be considered.

Beebe & Leonard (1994) looked at the impact of socio-cultural experiences on second language learning at the college level. They observed that direct communication with native speakers and the opportunity for cultural interchanges increased language learning for their students.

> The efforts at Iowa State and Santa Clara to incorporate experience based learning into the foreign language curriculum have been far-reaching...The most important measure of success is that the students, the faculty, and the native speakers are working together to further their understanding of each other's culture, to break down stereotypes, and to build bridges through an exchange of ideas, experiences and friendships (p. 4).

Long (1998) offers further evidence of the importance of learning in a social context based on her eight-year-old daughter's experiences in Iceland showing how play-based activities with native speaking peers was critical to language development.

Specific Techniques

Instructional Conversations

Instructional conversations are concrete, contextualized learning experiences in which children form their own oral texts. "Classroom instructional conversations must recreate true conversations in which both the teacher and the students are engaged as partners in the pursuit of some new understanding" (Perez, 1996, p. 173). She further states, "Instructional conversations can also help culturally and linguistically diverse students bridge the cross-cultural pragmatics of using language to communicate" (p. 174).

By participating in real conversations, students learn to ask questions, express ideas, agree and disagree, and express emotions—all part of becoming socially as well as linguistically competent. Perez (1996) states that many classroom teachers have "misconceptions about what the teaching of a second language involves" (p. 180). Teachers need to provide support for students in terms of instructional conversation and help students make connections to come to a better understanding of the world around them as they increase their language proficiency.

Using Children's Literature to Promote Second Language Development and Peer Collaboration

As discussed in previously cited articles, the context of natural language is very important to the acquisition of ESL learners. Language is learned more easily when it is part of a real event and when it has a purpose and can be used. Coonrod & Hughes (1994) state, "the integration of language and context is done best through the use of children's literature" (p. 319). Authentic children's stories provide ESL learners motivation to engage in language learning while fostering the thinking skills needed for

academic learning (Ghosn, 2002). "In summary, through the use of concrete reference and comprehensible information linked by literary selections, language minority students can develop concepts and content knowledge, even at the beginning level" (p. 321).

Children's literature not only motivates students but also encourages another important aspect of learning, peer collaboration. An article by Fassler (1998), who was studying ESL at the kindergarten level, states that

> peer collaboration turned out to be inextricably woven into the picture book reading experience. What struck me about the ESL children's interaction with the picture book was the array of personal resources they revealed for enhancing each other's oral expression in English, construction of meaning and dramatic appreciation of a literacy related experience (p.2).

Children's literature also helps to support practicing language in purposeful ways not only through conversation with the teacher but through informal learning encouragement such as having reading times throughout the day. Students were able to draw on the books as resources for language and ideas and "support each other's oral expression, construction of meaning, and dramatic appreciation of a literacy-related experience" (p. 8).

Crossroads: Literature and Language in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms by Cox & Boyd-Batstone (1997) provides a model for teaching with literature that supports language and literacy development for students learning English as a first or second language.

Using Collaborative Strategic Reading

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) combines two instructional approaches, reading comprehension strategy and cooperative learning. A student states, "it helps us learn new information from books and articles better than other ways" (Klingner & Vaughn, 2000). Standardized reading tests support the previous statement as scores for students using CSR were significantly higher than their peers who did not use CSR.

Teachers model the strategies for students which include *preview*, *getting the gist*, *click* and *clunk* (clicking is understanding, clunking is coming across words they don't understand), and *wrap up*. Then students take the strategy into small cooperative groups. Students are assigned roles: *leader clunk expert*, *gist expert*, *announcer*, *encourager*. "Roles are an important aspect of CSR because cooperative learning seems to work best when all group members have meaningful tasks" (p. 743). One teacher states, "I've seen so much improvement in their English. And they are participating in more subjects too" (p. 747).

Using a Sheltered English Approach

Sheltered English uses English as the medium for providing content area instruction, serving as a bridge from the self-enclosed ESL classroom to the academic mainstream. Research suggests that second language acquisition is a result of using language, and does not take place by learning the rules of the language. The principles of Sheltered English include the following: an emphasis on meaning not on form, the presentation of subject matter using contextual clues, interesting and relevant conversation and the allowance for a silent, pre-speech stage. Another important aspect is the "development of critical thinking and problem solving skills and English language skills which enable students to learn content area material through the medium of English" (Valdez Pierce, 1988, p.1). "Instead of teaching about language structures, Sheltered English activities develop language skills through subject matter instruction" (p.4). Hands-on activities and experiences are also an intrinsic aspect. Collaboration between bilingual, ESL and mainstream staff is essential in all aspects of instruction, curriculum planning and assessment.

Conclusion

In reviewing the research and experiences of those engaged directly with students learning English as a Second Language, it is evident that relevant, content-based materials taught in a socio-cultural context will have the greatest positive impact on second language acquisition. There is also strong evidence that formal and informal peer collaboration contribute towards learning English as a second language. In general, many of the same precepts supported in educational research within language arts hold true for second language acquisition.

Internet Resources

*Strategies and Resources for Mainstream Teachers of English Language Learners
In this issue of *By Request*, practical, research-based principles and instructional strategies are provided for mainstream teachers to meet the needs of diverse (English language) learners.
http://www.nwrel.org/request/2003may/ell.pdf

*TESL-EJ
The *Electronic Journal for Teachers of English as a Second or Foreign Language.*
Articles from this refereed publication are freely accessible online.
http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/

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